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Soap-Making's a Cinch . . .

By Ruth Cook

DON'T throw that waste fat away. Use it to make soap. Don't be discouraged by the thought of that messy, backyard task of soapmaking as Grandmother used to do it. You probably remember getting your eyes full of smoke from the smudge necessary for the making of lye. (Your Grandmother filtered water through the ashes to make the lye she used in her soap.)

Today, however, it's an entirely different process, and not at all messy. You can make it in the parlor if you like. Not only that, but you will have a finished product so pure and mild that it can be used on a baby's tender skin. By making your own soap in this inexpensive way, you may use the same high-grade soap for scrubbing floors and washing dishes that you use for washing your face or fine silks and woolens.

Here is the method used by Miss Martha A. Roth, home economist, a guest speaker during Farm and Home Week.

FIRST let's gather together the necessary equipment. Ordinary household equipment may be used, so long as it isn't made of aluminum. Lye reacts with aluminum. For mixing the soap you will need a crock, pan or bowl that will hold from one to two gallons. A long-handled iron, granite or wooden spoon for stirring and a two-quart measure for dissolving the lye are needed.

To mold the soap prepare a tight, shallow, wooden box (12 inches by 8 inches by 2½ inches), lining it with cotton cloth and setting it in a tray. You will also need the kitchen scales, dishpans containing warm and cold water to regulate the temperature, a thermometer with inside markings and a work-table well protected with several layers of evenly-spread newspaper.

If you are using waste fats your only expense need be for the can of lye. Lye is retailed at about 13 cents for a 13-ounce can. One can of lye with six pounds of clean fat will make nine pounds of soap. If you have no waste fat on hand, it can be purchased from the butcher for three to ten cents a pound. At three cents for fat your finished soap will have cost about three and one-half cents a pound. At ten cents the product will have cost eight cents a pound. If you do not have to buy fat the cost will be one and one-half cents a pound. Compare this price with that of the soaps you ordinarily buy for laundry and toilet purposes.

The first step in making soap is to have a clear, clean fat. Unclean fats give the soap a disagreeable odor as well as a dirty appearance. There are three

classes of fats—fats rendered from tallow and meat trimmings, meat fryings and other refuse fats, and cracklings.

THE first group are the best fats for soapmaking. They are ready for use, needing only to be cooked. The second group must be washed by adding an equal amount of water and bringing it to the boiling point. When you have removed it from the fire, stir it and add cold water (one quart of cold water to one gallon of the hot liquid) to precipitate foreign substances and to float the fat.

There are two kinds of cracklings, pressed and unpressed. Soap made from unpressed cracklings requires a special recipe and can be used only for washing and scrubbing; so it will not be considered here. In removing fat from pressed cracklings add one tablespoonful of lye to every gallon of pressed cracklings and water to twice the depth of the cracklings. Cover and boil one hour, remove from fire and pour cold water over them when they cease to boil. The cold water will again precipitate the foreign matter and bring the fat to the surface.

When the fat is rancid it should be washed at least once. It is wise to clean fats as they accumulate and store them until you are ready to use them. It is better to save the cleaned grease than the dirty or rancid fat.

DISSOLVING the lye will be the next step. Measure two and one-half pints of water in the container. Place the stirring spoon into the water; then pour in the lye. Cover the container with a soft paper and stir, being sure to leave none of the lye on the bottom of the pan. The paper cover prevents steam from getting into the nose and throat. As soon as the lye is dissolved, set in a pan of cold water, so that it will cool quickly.

Next weigh out 6 pounds of the clear fat. Melt it to a clear liquid and let it cool. Fats that thicken rapidly should not be cooled in ice-water. Let the cooling process be gradual, but not of too great length. The fat is ready to use when it pulls on the spoon as do honey and syrup when stirred.

Before mixing the lye and fat be sure that all temperatures are correct. Try to keep the room temperature uniform. Warmer lye and fat are used in a cool room, and cooler lye and fat in a warm room. It is impossible to give an invariable rule for the temperature of all fats and lye in combination. The following temperature chart is a good guide.

Soft rancid fat 97°F.-100°F.
Lye solution 75°F.-80°F.

Sweet lard or other soft fats 80°F.-85°F.
Lye solution 70°F.-75°F.
Lard and tallow (half and half) 100°F.-110°F.
Lye solution 80°F.-85°F.
All tallow 120°F.-130°F.
Lye solution 90°F.-95°F.

Now you are ready for the actual mixing. Pour the lye into the fat in a thin, even stream, letting it run down the side of the pan. Stir constantly with a steady circular motion, keeping the fat moving as smoothly and evenly as possible, always in the same direction. It must be stirred just fast enough to allow the fat to take up the lye during the pouring.

A few minutes after all the lye has been incorporated into the mixture it is ready to be poured into the molding box, which should be moistened to prevent soap from entering the wood. Pour it close to the box to prevent a change in temperature. Cover with a board and damp cloths.

At the end of 24 to 30 hours the soap is ready to be cut with a fine wire, strong string or thin bladed knife. The soap-making process is not yet completed, for at first the soap will burn if it touches the skin. Before it can be used it must be cured for a period of 10 to 14 days. Pack the soap into a paper carton and cover lightly.

Soap may be perfumed by placing fragrant leaves or sachet in the molding box. The soap will absorb the odor. If you prefer a floating soap, fold air in directly after the lye is added. After the curing period the soap may be polished by rubbing with the hands. Denatured alcohol will give it a high gloss.

If a separation of lye and fat occurs in making the soap, it may be reclaimed by shaving the soap, adding free lye and five pints of water. Melt with a gentle heat, adding more water till it becomes thick and syrupy. After it has been boiled gently it can be poured into the mold.

Miss Roth exhibited several bars of creamy white soap that she had made by this process. The soap had the same texture and appearance as that of popular brands of toilet soap on the market. With a little practice the average person can do as well. Remember, you'll never have a soap failure if your proportion and temperature are right and you use clean fat and a good quality of lye.

A vegetable box placed under the sink often saves a trip to the pantry or the cellar.

Dried fruits are especially valuable in winter when fresh fruit is scarce and usually expensive. They may be used in cooked cereals, muffins, cakes and sauces, or as a wholesome substitute for candy.